

Dear Mayor Spitaleri, Vice Mayor Griffith and Council:

The Sustainability Commission would like bring to Council's attention a significant body of research by Yale and George Mason University researchers. It concerns the American public's perception of climate change and energy policy issues, based on in-depth polling conducted in early September 2012. A total of seven reports, analyzing this data, have been released as part of the **Climate Change and the American Mind, Fall 2012 Series**. Concise summaries of all seven reports and links to them can be found here:

<http://www.climatechangecommunication.org/report/climate-change-american-mind-series-fall-2012>. In this letter, we provide you a brief summary of what we believe are important study findings of significance to the City of Sunnyvale.

The Yale Project on Climate Change Communication began conducting national public opinion studies in 2006 in an effort to determine why, in the face of ever-stronger climate science, the US has been so slow to act to minimize climate change. George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication engages in similar research, sometimes in conjunction with the Yale Project. The mission of the George Mason Center "is to conduct unbiased public engagement research - and to help government agencies, non-profit organizations, and companies apply the results of this research - so that collectively, we can stabilize our planet's life sustaining climate."

It is easy to get the impression from casual observation of our political discourse that American public opinion is so hopelessly polarized on Climate Change that any agreement is impossible and support for action is insufficient. However, the data from this joint study by George Mason and Yale University researchers dispels this notion. These *pre-Sandy* polls indicate broad agreement on some major issues, especially the need to develop clean energy. The polling also indicated support for action to combat climate change. Further, support for clean energy and climate action is on the rise after softening support in recent years. (Please note that though support for making climate action at least a moderate priority softened since 2008 before rebounding more recently, at no time did it fall below 50%.) Finally, the results of the George Mason and Yale studies appear to align with other recent major polls.

The information below is taken from the fourth report, especially relevant to decision-makers, Public Support for Climate and Energy Policies in September 2012.

<http://environment.yale.edu/climate/publications/Policy-Support-September-2012/>

#### **Highlights of Agreement the fourth George Mason/Yale Report:**

- **A large majority favors US leadership on Climate.** 61% said that the US should reduce its GHG emissions *regardless of what other countries did*. Only 15% disagreed. 25% had no opinion.
- **Super-majorities of Americans support more action to address global warming all around:** 71% said business and industry should be doing more to address global warming, 66% said citizens should be doing more, 60% said Congress should be doing more. (Only 53% said the President should be doing more.)
- **Over 2/3 of Americans support making global warming a very high, high or moderate priority for the President and Congress, while only 23 % say it should be a low priority.**

- **Support for government action to develop clean energy is especially strong.** 69% said that the President and Congress should make developing clean energy a *high or very high priority*. Another 23% said that developing clean energy should be a moderate priority. *Only 8% said that developing clean energy should be a low priority.*

**Other polls support Yale/George Mason Results:**

- **Super-majorities of California voters and even greater majorities of San Francisco Bay Area voters believe "there is sufficient evidence of Global Warming that actions need to be taken to combat it."** (64% of California voters, and 77% of San Francisco Bay Area Voters) February 2013 Field Poll:  
<http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/Rls2440.pdf>
- **A strong majority of Americans think the U.S. Government should do a great deal or quite a bit about Global Warming (57%).** *Only 22% think little or nothing should be done.*  
December 2012 AP-GfK Poll:  
<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ap-gfk-pollscience-doubters-say-world-warming>

If the Council would like a more in-depth presentation on this topic, we would be happy to present.

And if these findings spark your interest, you can explore the links below for more in-depth information:

- **Climate Change and the American Mind (including concise summaries all seven reports and links to the reports, themselves):**  
<http://climatechangecommunication.org/sites/default/files/reports/Policy-Support-September-2012.pdf>
- **American's Beliefs and Attitudes in September 2012** (the third from Climate Change and the American Mind:  
<http://climatechangecommunication.org/sites/default/files/reports/Climate-Beliefs-September-2012.pdf>
- **Public Support for Climate and Energy Policies in September 2012** (the fourth report, cited in this letter):  
<http://climatechangecommunication.org/sites/default/files/reports/Policy-Support-September-2012.pdf>
- **George Mason University Climate Change Communication:**  
<http://www.climatechangecommunication.org/welcome>
- **Yale Project on Climate Change Communication:**  
<http://environment.yale.edu/climate/>

Respectfully submitted,

Your Sustainability Commission